



# State of Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

*Office of the Governor*

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**Report submitted to: Calcasieu Parish Animal Control Officials and Calcasieu Parish Government**

**Date of Audit: November 16, 2009**

Representatives of the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section, recently completed an audit of your shelter facility located in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC) is very grateful for your cooperation in the audit. The goal of this audit is to assist local and parish governing agencies in evaluating shelter facilities and planning improvements. Please accept the following comments in the constructive manner in which they are intended.

The Calcasieu Parish animal shelter provided OPH personnel ready access to animal and personnel records. The shelter staff was very accommodating and shared information freely. Evidence of adequate record keeping was observed by the inspectors. In fact a computer program utilizing digital photographic identification is employed to track each animal from admission into the facility to final disposition. The shelter provides services to the citizens of Calcasieu Parish during regularly scheduled business hours. Fees are registered with the parish. Calcasieu Parish also carries out euthanasia services for a few small neighboring communities outside Calcasieu Parish.

A very attractive, modern waiting area greets visitors to the shelter. The waiting area is well-stocked with educational materials for the general public addressing many animal and humane issues. A large bulletin board for posting helpful public information as well as information on lost pets is made available to the public and occupies a prominent place in the waiting area. The shelter makes "humane" traps available to the public on request, and accepts many different species of animals, including nuisance wildlife. The shelter provided ample documentation of an effective program of returning such animals to the wild.

Storage of food and medical supplies, and carcass disposal procedures are sufficient for shelter needs. Lighting is excellent throughout the facility. Primary animal enclosures appear to be well maintained and in most instances are in a satisfactory state of repair. Sanitation methods also appear to be compliant with acceptable methods of shelter hygiene. A private company provides the shelter with a regular program of pest and rodent control. Veterinary care is provided four days per week by a contracted veterinarian. Vaccine, parasite control and spay/neuter policies meet or exceed accepted standards in Louisiana and shelter personnel demonstrate a basic knowledge of infection control when queried by the OPH inspector. Calcasieu parish electronically scans each animal for the presence of microchips upon entry into the shelter, thus providing a means of identifying owners to facilitate the animals' return. Records of employee training are excellent and the staff continually participates in extramural continuing education programs as well as formal in-house training.

The shelter maintains a separate room and table for euthanasia procedures and all euthanasia is performed by certified animal euthanasia technicians. Lethal injection, the preferred method of euthanasia in most

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pet species, is the exclusive method of euthanasia employed at the shelter. The shelter also does an exemplary job of separating dogs and cats and separating intact females from males.

The shelter abides by a policy of holding animals that are deemed "un-adoptable" for a minimum of five days before final determination of fate. This minimum holding period is increased to five weeks on animals determined to be adoptable and a very effective, active adoption program is enthusiastically supported and promoted by the shelter staff. Housing of animals in cohorts of vicious and/or potentially dangerous (including rabies observations) animals, unadoptable animals, and adoptable animals is strictly observed and provides an additional layer of assurance that animals will not be mistakenly handled or misidentified.

The Calcasieu Parish animal shelter is also to be complimented for the use of feral cat dens to introduce cats to the shelter environment and to protect workers from exposure to potentially fractious cats. The dens are designed to provide a frightened animal a quiet 'hiding place'. The animal is secured inside by closing the porthole door. The entire den can then be removed from the cage for cleaning, treatment, or transport. This equipment eliminates risk of handler injury while providing a stress-free environment for the animal. After acclimation the cats often use these dens as elevated perches within cages.

I. The following suggestions are made based on the state statute (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.) listing minimum standards that may be adopted by public governing authorities:

A. Adequate local supervision: Louisiana law states that "shelters should be inspected at least once every six months by an authorized representative of the parish to determine compliance with the requirements" set forth in state statutes. Although the supervisory structure of the shelter was thoroughly explained to the auditors, no written record of a formal system of inspection by any parish official was brought forth. LAWC suggests that the parish establish a regular program of inspection and document the results for later examination by OPH auditors. This system of inspection should be recorded in a written policy.

B. Posting of fees: The fees for shelter services are not obviously posted in the waiting area. Based upon state law, LAWC recommends that the fees be "visibly" posted. LAWC recommends that the fees be displayed in a manner that is apparent to shelter visitors, e.g. in large font on an appropriate sign or poster. Credit is due the shelter for prominently displaying fees on the shelter website.

C. No emergency phone number was posted on the exterior of the building. The state standard is that "hours of operation and emergency telephone numbers shall be prominently displayed." LAWC suggests that emergency after hours contact information be posted in an obvious position near the entrance of the building.

D. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "shelter shall be provided for all dogs and cats kept outdoors when atmospheric temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit," and that "the ambient temperature...not be allowed to fall below fifty degrees Fahrenheit." Animals in the outdoor "unadoptable" dog kennel are protected from cold by canvas tarps that are lowered when the temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit. This system is of limited effectiveness and electric or gas heaters would improve the situation dramatically. The shelter leadership informed the inspectors that plans exist to enclose this structure and to provide heating and ventilation.

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Adoption of the following practices should serve to improve the public image of the facility, enhance health and safety of the animals and workers, and/or decrease the likelihood of legal incidents and public complaints.

II. Suggestions by LAWC to improve shelter management:

A. Calcasieu Parish Animal Control abides by Article I, Section 5 and Article III, Section 5 of the parish ordinances, which deal with cruelty to animals, nuisance or stray animals, vicious or dangerous animals, and rabies control and licensing. The standards for Louisiana public shelters specified in the Louisiana Revised Statutes are not included in the ordinance. Parish government is strongly urged to include shelter standards in Parish ordinances.

B. Primary enclosures: Louisiana law states that "primary enclosures shall be structurally sound and maintained in good repair to protect dogs and cats from injury, to contain them, and to keep predators out," and "constructed and maintained so as to enable the dogs and cats to remain dry and clean." Almost all of the cages at the facility meet the above criteria. A few of the smaller primary enclosures for housing cats are of the type intended for temporary housing of animals for short periods of time. Some of the cages exhibit significant rust. These conditions are not conducive to sanitation and are not resistant to accumulation of substrate that may promote bacterial growth. Stainless steel or non-porous fiberglass cages are preferred and would provide surfaces that are much more easily sanitized, are resistant to corrosion and the resulting accumulation of organic debris.

C. If assets become available the shelter should consider construction of a dedicated observation and/or isolation ward for incoming animals. Some animals suffering from minor illnesses might be salvaged and later offered for adoption. Also, a two week observation period for incoming adoptable animals could facilitate identification of animals with medical problems, further protecting against introduction of contagious diseases into the adoptable population. The present facility does not appear to foster the development of such a "quarantine" area.

D. Although the waiting area is modern and attractive and presents a welcoming environment to visitors, odor throughout the inside facility is very strong. This may be the result of a ventilation system shared with areas of the building utilized for housing animals. LAWC recognizes the expense of redesigning ventilation systems. Use of animal safe premise deodorizers or "air scrubbers" might prove helpful in the interim however, should funds become available for improvements to ventilation, separating the heating/ventilation/air conditioning systems of public areas, work areas, and animal housing areas is recommended.

E. The decision to euthanize is made by the kennel supervisor, unless the reason for euthanasia is health or injury related, in which case the decision is made by the veterinarian. This decision is certified by the animal control director or the director's support staff. LAWC recognizes the value of and endorses this "two-tiered" system of approval. LAWC recommends that this procedure be documented in writing in the form of a standard shelter policy, therefore eliminating any perception by the public that the decision is reached arbitrarily or capriciously.

F. LAWC recognizes the importance of written policies for procedures at public animal shelters. The staff of the Calcasieu Parish Animal Shelter is in the process of writing and implementing several standard operating procedure documents dealing with shelter management and operations. LAWC recommends that management finalize and publish written policies for storage of food and supplies, shelter hygiene, employee training, isolation of animals, euthanasia, feeding, and shelter oversight. These protocols will assist in training employees and should reduce the chance for inadvertent errors.

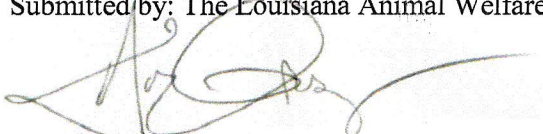
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G. LAWC suggests that dogs in the outdoor "unadoptable" dog kennel be separated by size. In many instances small dogs were housed with larger dogs. This may be problematic should the dogs react to one another aggressively.

This concludes the report. OPH will request the statistics from calendar year 2009 in early January. Please be vigilant for the request.

Thanks again to the Calcasieu Parish Animal Shelter for its cooperation in this audit. LAWC recognizes the shelter's dedication to humane animal control and animal welfare in Louisiana.

Submitted by: The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Amy Grayson', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Amy Grayson, R. Ph, DVM, Commissioner

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